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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on group dynamics and introduces the use of initiative activities as a means of facilitating a more cohesive group experience in outdoor programs. Specific topics addressed and defined include: (1) curative factors of groups (universality, didactic learning, altruism, socialization, peer learning, group cohesiveness); (2) stages of group development (orientation, conflict, cohesion, performance); (3) types of group levels (group task level, group maintenance level, individual level); and (4) roles of group members (task roles, maintenance roles, and task and maintenance combined). Destructive roles of group members (aggression, blocking, dominating, out-of-field behavior, special interest, and horsing around) are also defined. Proper use of initiative activities such as icebreakers and communication exercises can facilitate increased communication, problem solving, teamwork, and trust. Initiative activities can accelerate or decelerate the group development process. Six initiative activities are described in the appendix: name game, identity cards, trait pictures, blindfolded triangle, blindfolded mute number line-up, and mute acid river crossing. Contains 12 references. (SAS)

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Group Dynamics and Initiative Activities with Outdoor Programs
10th International Conference on Outdoor Recreation - Nov. 7-9, 1996

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Group Dynamics and Initiative Activities with Outdoor Programs
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Abstract:

Research shows that members of cohesive groups rate their group experience as more enjoyable, less stressful, and more productive. This paper focuses on group dynamics and introduces the use of initiative activities as a means of facilitating a more cohesive group experience. Specific topics include curative factors of groups, group development, group levels, and group roles. Icebreaker and communication activities are also discussed.

Groups are an essential part of all outdoor programs and outdoor experiences. Outdoor programs are comprised of a variety of groups including full-time and part-time staff, instructors, trip leaders, support personnel, and customers/participants. If these groups cease to exist, so do outdoor programs. Thus, it only makes sense to ensure the survival of groups by enhancing the group experience. Research shows that cohesive groups are associated with high levels of enjoyment, satisfaction, and productivity (Forsyth, 1990). Facilitating group cohesion is, therefore, an excellent way to enhance the group experience. Improving personal leadership skills and increasing a leader's awareness of group dynamics are methods of addressing group cohesion. Focusing solely on leadership ignores the contributions and importance of group members. Thus, this paper will focus on increasing knowledge of group dynamics and the utilization of initiative activities within the group in order to facilitate a sense of cohesion among group members.

Group Dynamics

Group dynamics involves the interaction of group members and group leaders. According to Benne and Sheats (1948), "The functions to be performed both in building and maintaining group-centered activity . . . are primarily member roles. Leadership functions can be defined in terms of facilitating

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identification, acceptance, development and allocation of these group-required roles by the group" (p. 42). In other words, members are partially responsible for the outcome of their experience and leaders should help facilitate this acceptance of responsibility. Thus, it is extremely important for group leaders to be aware of the dynamics within a group. Several forces are at work within groups including curative factors, stages of group development, group levels, and group roles.

Curative Factors of Groups. Humans are committed to a social existence and are, therefore, intimately involved in social interactions. People affiliate in order to receive benefits of group membership. Yalom (1985) developed ten curative factors of groups to help explain the "intricate interplay of various guided human experiences" (p. 3). These factors operate in every type of group but can be experienced differently by each group member. Experiencing these factors as a result of group membership can help each group member draw meaning and enjoyment from the experience. By encouraging these factors to emerge, group leaders increase the chances of a positive group experience. Six of these factors are described below.

1. Universality: Connections with others, common concerns and problems.
2. Didactic Learning: Information giving, sharing knowledge.
3. Altruism: helping others, can raise one's self esteem.
4. Socialization: benefits from interactions with others.
5. Peer Learning: people often learn better from one another.
6. Group Cohesiveness: acceptance from others, belonging, support.

Stages of Group Formation. Groups go through four stages of development: forming, storming, norming, and performing (Vreeken, 1990, Murk, 1994, Turner, 1977). These stages are sequential; however, groups may regress to a previous stage or show characteristics of more than one stage at the same time. These stages are described below.

Group Stage	Characteristics
Forming (Orientation)	look for belonging and acceptance unsure of group interactions & behavior polite discourse tentative interactions beginning self-disclosure
Storming (Conflict)	power struggles and conflict attempt to establish a pecking order coalition formation
Norming (Cohesion)	feeling of "groupness" and "we-ness" unity, stability, and satisfaction effective communication
Performing (Performance)	decision making and problem solving mutual cooperation potential for high productivity

A general understanding of group development is important for many reasons. First of all, the role of leader changes with each stage. While in the forming stage, group members expect more direction, facilitation, and verbal interaction from a leader. In storming, we may need to draw upon our vast experience to recognize problems, hostile feelings, emerging coalitions, and active conflict. Members may be able to work through these issues for themselves; however, the leader may also need to intervene. In norming and performing, groups become more active and involved, thus requiring less control and direction by the leader. Complaints regarding leadership may very well stem from actions inappropriate to the group's stage of development.

When an outdoor experience ends, participants' attitudes vary depending upon the groups' stage of development. If the group is in conflict, participants are likely to feel frustrated and distant. Evaluations will reflect this negativity. If an experience ends while the group is in norming, group members experience a heightened sense of "groupness". This leads to a positive attitude towards the group and the outdoor experience as a whole. When the trip is successful, the agency benefits through positive evaluations and word-of-mouth advertising.

Group Levels. Groups operate at three different levels; group task level, group maintenance level, and individual level (Murk, 1994). Task level refers to what a group is trying to accomplish. It is its mission or purpose.

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Some examples may include a corporate task force, an environmental clean-up event, or a skill-building workshop. Group maintenance level involves relationships and interactions between the members. This has also been referred to as the "social climate", feel, and sensitivity of the group (Corey & Corey, 1992). The individual level involves the particular needs and characteristics of each member. Individual needs can lead group members to carry out roles that enhance either task or maintenance functions.

Group Roles. Roles have a tendency to emerge in all groups and correspond to task or maintenance levels. Task roles serve to keep the group functioning with regard to their purpose and goals. Maintenance roles enhance morale and strengthen the group. Other roles combine both task and maintenance functions. Roles that members play often correspond to their personality; however, some emerge as a result of group needs. All roles are necessary if the group is to be productive, cohesive and satisfying. In fact, research demonstrates that the mere act of assuming a role is associated with increased feelings of cohesiveness (Mudrack & Farrell, 1995). Group roles are described below.

Task Roles (Turner, 1977):

1. Initiating Activity: proposing solutions, suggesting new ideas, new definitions of the problem or new organization of material.
2. Seeking Information: asking for clarification of suggestions, requesting new or additional information or facts.
3. Seeking Opinion(s): looking for an expression of feeling about something from the members, seeking clarification of values, suggestions, or ideas.
4. Giving Information: offering facts or generalizations, relating one's own experience to the group problem under discussion to illustrate a point.
5. Giving Opinions: stating an opinion or belief concerning an offered suggestion.

6. Elaborating: clarifying, giving examples or developing meaning, trying to envision how a proposed idea might work if adopted/adapted.

7. Coordinating: showing relationships among various ideas or suggestions, trying to pull ideas and suggestions together, trying to draw together activities of various subgroups or members.

8. Summarizing: pulling together related ideas or suggestions, restating the suggestions raised after the group has thoroughly discussed them. (p. 11)

Maintenance Roles (Murk,1994):

1. Encouraging: being friendly, warm and responsive to others; accepting others and their contributions, rewarding others by giving them an opportunity, a choice, or an important recognition.

2. Expressing Group Feelings: sensing feelings, moods, relationships within the group; sharing his/her own feelings or effects with/on other members.

3. Harmonizing: attempting to reconcile disagreements, reducing tensions, getting people to explore their differences.

4. Compromising: when his/her own idea(s) or status is involved in a conflict, offering to compromise his/her own position, admitting errors, disciplining oneself to maintain group cohesion.

5. Gate-keeping: attempting to keep communication channels open, facilitating the participation of others, and suggesting procedures for sharing opportunities for discussing group problems. (p. 6-7)

Task and Maintenance Roles Combined (Phipps,1984):

1. Evaluating: submitting group decisions or accomplishments to compare with group standards, measuring accomplishments against goals.

2. Diagnosing: determining sources of difficulties, appropriate steps to take next, analyzing the main blocks to program.

3. Testing for consensus: tentatively asking for group opinions in order to find out if the group is reaching consensus.

4. Mediating: harmonizing, conciliating differences in points of view, making compromise solutions.

5. Relieving tensions: draining off negative feeling by joking or pouring oil on troubled waters, putting tense situations in a wider context. (p. 182)

The above mentioned roles all serve to build a better group. These constructive roles help maintain positive relationships and accomplish the determined goals. However, there are also destructive roles that serve to inhibit group functioning. Emergence of these roles may indicate that there are issues that need resolving or that a member has needs that are overridden. Murk (1994) defines some destructive roles as follows:

1. Aggression: deflating the status of others, expressing disapproval of the values or attitudes others hold, attacking the group of the problem it is working on, joking in a "barbed" way.

2. Blocking: impeding the movement of the group for personal reasons reflected by such behaviors as: disagreeing unreasonably, resisting stubbornly, repeatedly bringing up subjects the group has rejected or disposed of. Arguing too much on a point and rejecting ideas without consideration.

3. Dominating: trying to assert authority or superiority by manipulating the group or certain members of the group, controlling by means of flattery or other forms of patronizing behavior, and asserting a superior status and often interrupting the contributions of others.

4. Out-of-Field Behavior: making a display of one's lack of involvement; the "I couldn't care less" performance.

5. Special Interest: using the group to promote extraneous interests, solicitations, and special self-interest projects.

6. Horsing Around: always clowning, joking, mimicking, disrupting the work of the group.

7. Withdrawal: acting indifferent, resorting to excessive formalities, daydreaming, whispering to others, wandering from the subject. (p. 8)

The benefits of role recognition are many. Informal leaders emerge through role behavior. Knowing where the power lies is invaluable. Also, situations arise that require task and maintenance behavior. Leaders need to know who to call upon. Finally, roles can indicate underlying issues in need of attention. Destructive roles may indicate conflict or dissatisfaction. The way these issues are handled will make the difference between a positive or negative outcome.

Initiative Activities

Most people associate initiative activities with Ropes Courses. Proper use of initiative activities facilitates increased communication, problem-solving, teamwork, and trust. The process involves setting up an activity scenario specifically designed for the group, having the group engage in the activity, and then debriefing the experience. Depending upon the desired goals, the process can be used formally for maximized effect or informally for the experience.

Initiative activities can accelerate or decelerate the group development process. As discussed previously, a group in the norming stage experiences a sense of "groupness" and cohesion. Thus, if outdoor leaders accelerate a group through the forming and storming stages into norming, the probability of an enjoyable group experience is increased.

The purpose of outdoor trips or workshops is not to teach group dynamics and initiative activities; thus, it is not appropriate to utilize these activities throughout the outdoor experience. However, employing selected activities at the beginning of the group experience serves as an excellent warm-up and even achieves a little "preventative maintenance". Activities of particular importance are icebreaker and communication exercises. See the Appendix for activity examples.

Icebreaker activities are used to help members of a group learn others' names and to get acquainted. As the name implies, they also help "break the ice" so that group members feel more open to one another. An open and relaxed atmosphere allows a free exchange of information. This sets the stage for improved communication. Examples of icebreaker activities include name games, identity cards, personal trait lists, etc.

Group members become aware of their communication styles through the use of communication initiatives. This is particularly helpful when teamwork is essential for a successful experience. Poor communication and lack of information sharing leads to decreased ability to accomplish tasks (e.g., trip planning, route selection, camp maintenance activities, etc.). Initiative exercises encourage them to give and receive information, pool their resources, and practice good communication techniques. A variety of activities exist that focus on communication. Some particularly useful ones make use of blindfolds in order to help participants focus on verbal interactions. Other activities disallow participants to talk, thus forcing them to explore other methods of communication.

Conclusion

The focus of this paper was to increase knowledge of group dynamics and the utilization of initiative activities in order to facilitate a sense of cohesion among group members. The outdoor experience and group experience are interdependent. By enhancing the group experience, the probability of a successful outdoor experience is heightened. Using initiative activities within the group process can assist groups to achieve group cohesion. Activities of particular importance are icebreaker and communication exercises. By utilizing these activities at the beginning of the group experience, the group may be able to progress through forming and storming more quickly. The ultimate goal of implementing initiative activities and knowledge of group dynamics is to facilitate a positive group experience.

Appendix

Activity	Brief Description
Name Game	Participants stand in a circle. Each person should think of a dance for themselves. First person says "My name is _____ and I dance like (do dance). Next person repeats the person in front of them and then does his/her own dance, etc.
Identity Cards	Participants get a 4x6 card. They put their name in the middle. In each corner they should be instructed to put traits, favorite activities, favorite person, etc. Each member then takes turns explaining his/her card.
Trait Pictures	Using clip art or magazine pictures, etc., a variety of images should be placed in the middle of the group. Each person selects images that represents his/her personality traits, a favorite place, favorite activity, etc. Members take turns showing and explaining images.
Blindfolded Triangle	Participants are blindfolded and have their hand placed on a rope. They are instructed to form a triangle out of the rope. They cannot slide along rope.
Blindfolded/Mute Number Line-up	Participants are blindfolded, instructed not to talk, and then given a number. They must then line up by number from lowest to highest. The key is to find an alternative method of communicating their numbers to each other.
Mute Acid River Crossing	Participants are given three boards and must use them to get from one platform to another (usually 2-4 platforms). They are instructed not to use verbal communication methods.

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